

Alkali Muhly To Be Released In 2005

Species good for riparian restoration, offers potential for other uses

Alkali muhly, sometimes called scratchgrass, (*Muhlenbergia asperifolia*) will be released in 2005 by the Plant Materials Center to commercial seed producers. The typical habitats for this species are damp meadows, moist riparian zones, and mesic (moderately moist) disturbed areas often with alkaline and saline soils. Alkali muhly is a perennial grass with elongated scaly rhizomes (underground stems that spread from the original plant and initiate new plants) and an open, finely-branched seed head up to 18 inches tall. The seed used to develop this selected release was collected in a damp arroyo bottom near the Westwater Spring in San Juan County, New Mexico. Selection for agronomic production potential has resulted from several successive field plantings at the Plant Material Center.

The application of this species for riparian restoration on mesic sites with moderate salinity or alkalinity is a certainty. The Plant Material Center will be investigating the potential range of use of this species on more xeric and saline soils. The rhizomatous nature of this species as well as its tendency to thrive on shorelines of ditches and streams will make it very useful in bank stabilization. Because of its rapid spread, it could be planted as seedling stock at low density to rapidly colonize stream and ditch banks susceptible to erosion.

Several commercial seed producers have expressed interest in producing alkali muhly seed. Several land management agencies have also encouraged the development of this release in particular the U.S. Department of Interior-Bureau of Reclamation, which has partially funded this effort. Alkali muhly seed should be commercially available in 2008. Seed will be available from the Plant Material Center for Field Office evaluation plantings in 2006.

